

Surplus Agricultural Products Grant

Food for Farmers and Texas Families

My name is Dr. Katherine Byers and I'm the Government Relations Officer at the Houston Food Bank (HFB). We provide access to more than 150 million nutritious meals in 18 counties through our 1,600 community partners including schools and pantries and smaller regional partner food banks such as those in Montgomery, Trinity, Brazos Valley, and Galveston. The mission of HFB and the philosophy of all of those we partner with is, "Food for Better Lives." So, I'm here today to talk about strengthening a funding opportunity for farmers that also nourishes the communities you serve.

The Surplus Agricultural Products Grant offsets farmers' costs of harvesting, storing, packaging, and transporting second grade produce that is unsellable due to imperfections or market conditions. This produce is then available to food banks to distribute to families in need.

Since 2001, the Surplus Agricultural Products Grant, has assisted food banks in acquiring fresh produce. In FY '21 HFB distributed 91 million pounds of produce, that's 35.4% of our total distribution and we are hoping to do more in order to increase the positive economic impact nutritional food has on areas such as medical costs, hospital emergency room use, and school attendance rates.

Unfortunately, transportation costs have increased and for most food banks so has the cost of produce so \$10.2m of grant funding doesn't purchase what it previously did. For the Houston Food Bank prices went up from an average of approximately .13 per pound to .18 per pound which is a substantial increase. Input costs for produce such as fertilizer, labor, packaging, pallets etc. have almost doubled for many farmers and we know they have already taken an economic hit of hundreds of millions of dollars over the last few years.

Benefits of the Surplus Agricultural Products Grant

100% of program funds go to farmers

Offsets costs to farmers of harvesting, storing, packaging, and transporting food

Reduces food waste

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“There’s not a lot of food left over at the end of the month, and not enough money to purchase new groceries sometimes. Me and my mother need to watch our diets and focus on eating fresh, nutritious foods that tend to be more expensive. “The produce they’re giving us ... would cost \$5 or \$6 in the store. Man, that was just a great help.”

-Larry Brown, 62-year-old military veteran and HFB client

Houston Food Bank, along with Feeding Texas, the state association to which we belong, will be asking the legislature for an increase of \$10 million dollars bringing the grant funding to a total of \$20 million. While inflation is causing everyone to stretch their dollars a little farther, food banks have historically translated \$1 of Surplus Agricultural Grant funding into eight pounds of fresh produce for families in need. So, this grant is a wise investment of the state’s resources and is one direct allocation that can impact multiple sectors.



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